

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

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INFO AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NI

SUBJECT: GOWON CLEARS COMWALK

REF: LAGOS 8411

SUMMARY: INSTATEMENT OVER WEEKEND GENERAL GOWON
CLEARED BENUE-PLATEAU GOVERNOR GOMWALK OF CORRUPTION
CHARGES, AND WARNED THAT FMG WILL NOT TOLERATE USE
OF PRESS AND COURTS AS INSTRUMENTS OF BLACKMAIL. BY
PERSONALLY SUPPORTING RECENT THREAT OF PRESS CRACK-DOWN,
GOWON HAS PROBABLY ENDED ANY LAST DOUBTS ON FMG'S
WILLINGNESS TO PULL REINS ON NEWSPAPERS. PRESS IS
LIKELY TO TAKE HINT AND ALLOW GOMWALK AFFAIR TO FADE
FROM HEADLINES. END SUMMARY.

1. IN STATEMENT RELEASED OVER WEEKEND AND BASED ON
THEIR FRIDAY MEETING (REFTEL), GENERAL GOWON CLEARED
BENUE-PLATEAU GOVERNOR GOMWALK OF RECENT CORRUPTION
CHARGES (KADUNA 615). AT SAME TIME HE "AUTHORIZED
GOMWALK TO RELEASE HIS DETAILED EXPLANATION" OF
CASE. GOWON CONCLUDED STATEMENT BY WARNING THAT
FMG WILL NOT TOLERATE USE OF COURTS OR PRESS "AS
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INSTRUMENTS OF BLACKMAIL AGAINST HIGHLY PLACED PUBLIC
OFFICIALS." ON MORE IMPROMPTU LEVEL, HEAD OF STATE

REPORTEDLY TOLD NEWSMEN AT PRESS CONFERENCE BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR PRC ON SATURDAY THAT IF PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HIS APPOINTEES CONTINUE "THERE IS NO WAY COUNTRY WILL NOT QUESTION MY OWNKNTEGRITY."

2. FOLLOWING GOWON STATEMENT, GOVERNORS ROTIMI AND FARUK ADDED THEIR VOICES TO THOSE OF SENIOR FMG OFFICIALS CONDEMNING PRESS "FOR GOING TOO FAR" IN PRINTING CHARGES OF CORRUPTION.

3. NEW NIGERIAN AND SKETCH WERE ONLY NEWSPAPERS EDITORIALIZING ON GOWON STATEMENT. BOTH ACCEPTED GOWON'S DECISION AND AGREED THAT PRESS SHOULD NOT ENGAGE IN BALCKMAIL; BOTH, HOWEVER, DENIED THAT NIGERIAN PRESS HAD ATTEMPTED BLACKMAIL AND CONTINUED TO SUPPORT RIGHT OF NEWSPAPERS TO EXPOSE OFFICIAL CORRUPTION. PRESS, GENERALLY, HAS INTERPRETED GOWON'S "PERMISSION" TO GOMWALK TO RELEASE HIS SIDE OF CASE AS ORDER TO DO SO.

4. COMMENT: STRONG GOWON REACTION TO PRESS PRINTING OF AND EDITORIALIZING ON CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST GOMWALK DEMONSTRATES EXTENT OF FMG UNHAPPINESS OVER NEWSPAPER EXPOSES OF WRONG-DOING AT SENIOR GOVERNMENT LEVELS. QUICKNESS OF GOVERNOR'S EXONERATION ALSO PROBABLY DUE TO GOWON'S DESIRE TO SETTLE ISSUE BEFORE HE LEFT COUNTRY. IT IS LIKELY THAT GOWON'S DECISION WAS BASED MORE ON FEAR THAT ACCUSATIONS WOULD DEVELOP INTO THREAT TO NATIONAL UNITY AND STABILITY (LAGOS A-190) THAN ON FACTUAL QUESTION OF GOMWALK'S GUILT OR INNOCENCE.

5. BY PERSONALLY SUPPORTING RECENT POLICE IG THREAT OF PRESS CRACK-DOWN (LAGOS 8062), GOWON HAS PROBABLY ENDED ANY LINGERING NEWSPAPER DOUBTS OF FMG'S WILLINGNESS TO FORCIBLY PULL REINS ON PRESS IF NECESSARY. THUS, ALTHOUGH MAY OPEN HIMSELF TO FURTHER CRITICISM IF HE FAILS TO RELEASE HIS DETAILED EXPLANATION IN NEAR FUTURE, PRESS IS LIKELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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TO TAKE GOWON'S HINT AND ALLOW GOMWALK AFFAIR TO FADE FROM HEADLINES -- ESPECIALLY AS GOVERNOR'S ACCUSER HAS BEEN RELEASED FROM DETENTION.

6. IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR WHY GOWON INCLUDED JUDICIARY IN HIS WARNING. MORE ACTIVIST ROLE TAKEN BY COURTS LATELY, HOWEVER, MAY HAVE LED HIM TO CAUTION JUDICIARY TO MOVE CAREFULLY IN THIS AREA.
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